

Licensing Committee

Wednesday, 19th November, 2025

MEETING OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Doran (Chairperson);
Aldermen McCullough and Rodgers, and
Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Bradley,
T. Brooks, Bunting, Carson, M. Donnelly,
P. Donnelly, D. Douglas, McCann,
McDowell, McKay, McKeown and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Mr. K. Bloomfield, HMO Manager;
Mr. K. McDonnell, Solicitor (Regulatory and Planning); and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of The High Sheriff (Councillor McAteer).

Declarations of Interest

Alderman McCullough declared an interest in item 2a – Licences Issued Under Delegated Authority, in that he was a Member of the North Belfast Orange Memorial Hall which was linked with the Alexandra Social and Recreation Club, but he confirmed that he was not associated with the Social Club.

Councillor T. Brooks declared an interest under item 3c - Guidance for Students and Landlords in respect of their Rights and Responsibilities regarding HMOs, in that she worked for Queen's University Belfast.

It was noted that the Members were not required to retire from the meeting whilst the matters were under consideration.

Schedule of Meetings 2026

The Committee approved the schedule of meetings and agreed to meet on the following dates in 2026, with all meetings to commence at 5.15pm:

- Wednesday, 21st January
- Wednesday, 18th February
- Wednesday, 18th March
- Wednesday, 22nd April
- Wednesday, 20th May
- Wednesday, 17th June
- Wednesday, 19th August
- Wednesday, 16th September
- Wednesday, 14th October
- Wednesday, 18th November
- Wednesday, 16th December

Delegated Matters

**THE COMMITTEE DEALT WITH THE FOLLOWING THREE ITEMS IN
PURSUANCE OF THE POWERS DELEGATED TO IT UNDER
STANDING ORDER 37(d)**

Licences Issued Under Delegated Authority

The Committee noted a list of applications for licences which had, since its last meeting, been approved under the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

**Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licences
Issued Under Delegated Authority**

The Committee noted a list of applications which had been approved under the Council's Scheme of Delegation during September and October 2025.

**Application for the Variation of 7-Day Annual
Entertainments Licence for The Spaniard,
3 Skipper Street**

The Director of Planning and Building Control advised the Committee that an application had been received from JK Pubs Limited, for the variation of its 7-Day Annual Entertainments Licence based on the Council's standard conditions, to provide music, singing, dancing or any other entertainment of a like kind.

The Members were advised that the days and hours during which entertainment may be provided under the current Entertainments Licence were:

- Monday – Saturday 11:30am to 2.00am the following morning
- Sunday 12:30pm to 2.00am the following morning.

She outlined that the variation applied for, was to extend the hours during which entertainment may be provided to 3.00am the following morning, every night of the week.

At present entertainment was provided in the form of DJ's and live bands on Friday and Saturday nights.

The Committee was advised that public notice of the application had been placed in the newspaper and no written representation had been lodged. The Police Service of Northern Ireland had been consulted in relation to the application and had confirmed that they had no objection to the variation. The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue service had been consulted and had confirmed that they had no objection to the application. Additionally, no noise complaints had been received by the Building Control Service in respect of the venue in the past 12 months.

The applicant, Ms. J. Kane, was welcomed to the meeting. She stated that she was requesting the variation to extend the permitted hours until 3.00am, as they felt that the premises was an integral part of Belfast's nightlife and that an increase in operating hours would allow them to compete within the sector, which was essential for the commercial success of the business. She emphasised that they were not planning on utilising the 3am close on every occasion.

Moved by Councillor McCann,
Seconded by Councillor Carson and

Resolved – that the Committee approves the application for the variation of the 7-Day Annual Entertainments Licence, to vary the hours during which entertainment may be provided as requested, to 3.00am the following morning on every night of the week.

Non-Delegated Matters

Notice of Motion - Unite's Work Safe Home Safe Campaign

The Director of Planning and Building Control presented the following motion which had been referred to the Licensing Committee, by the Standards and Business Committee, on 23rd October:

“Unite's Work Safe Home Safe Campaign

Unite's Work Safe / Home Safe campaign is a direct response to the harassment, violence, and unsafe travel faced by hospitality and night-time economy workers in Belfast. Research shows that over 90% of hospitality workers experience sexual harassment at work. Unite's 2025 survey in Northern Ireland found:

- 42% of workers walk home after shifts due to lack of transport,
- 77% receive no employer support for safe travel,
- 53% have witnessed or experienced harassment or assault on their way home after a shift,
- 68% of women routinely witness or experience sexual harassment in the workplace.

This Council notes:

1. That harassment, spiking and gender-based violence remain widespread in hospitality and the night-time economy, disproportionately affecting women, young, migrant and LGBT+ workers.
2. That hospitality and the night-time economy are major employers and economic drivers for Belfast and Northern Ireland, supporting tens of thousands of jobs and contributing over £1 billion annually to the regional economy.

3. That the Northern Ireland Executive, has announced funding for a one-year pilot of late-night public transport services in Belfast, with Belfast City Council co-funding the scheme. This is a welcome step that will help customers and the public get home safely, strengthen the night-time economy, and improve the city's connectivity. However, it does not remove the responsibility on employers to provide safe, paid transport home for staff who finish work after public services end.
4. That under the Licensing (NI) Order 1996 and Entertainment Licensing (NI) Order 1985, the Council has powers to promote public safety and prevent crime and disorder through licensing policy.

This Council resolves to:

1. Amend Belfast City Council's licensing and entertainment policy to require venues seeking late-night opening to:
 - Adopt and enforce zero-tolerance anti-harassment and anti-spiking policies;
 - Display clear reporting procedures for staff and customers;
 - Provide safe transport home, paid for by the employer, for staff finishing after hours where public transport is more limited or unavailable.
2. Adopt a Belfast Charter against harassment in hospitality, based on Unite's Work Safe / Home Safe campaign, including:
 - Scrapping sexist dress codes;
 - Visible anti-harassment and reporting posters;
 - Free, discreet spiking test kits in venues;
 - Funding and mandating training on harassment and workplace safety developed with the involvement of, and full access for, trade unions and women's groups.
3. Work with Unite, the Department for Infrastructure and Translink to ensure the late-night transport pilot:
 - Prioritises passenger and staff safety through staffing, CCTV and lighting;
 - Covers public demand without being used as a substitute for employer-funded transport for staff;
 - Is reviewed with input from hospitality workers, including transport workers, and their unions.
4. Lobby the Northern Ireland Executive, the Department for Communities and MLAs to introduce stronger protections and minimum standards so that all workers can travel home safely after late and unsocial hours, and so that employers play their full part in funding safe and fair transport.

5. Report annually on progress, consulting with workers, unions and transport staff, and publish findings on safety, compliance and the impact on harassment and violence in the night-time economy.”

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Groogan, the proposer of the motion, and Councillor Collins, the seconder of the motion, to address the meeting. Together, they outlined the reasons behind the motion, highlighted that it was a particularly gendered issue and requested that the Committee would consider inviting Unite Hospitality NI to a future meeting to discuss the motion.

The Committee noted that the Notice of Motion had been received and agreed that a subsequent report would be submitted to the Licensing Committee, outlining a detailed consideration of the practicalities of the implementation of the Motion and the potential costs implications.

Furthermore, the Committee agreed to invite Unite Hospitality NI to present to a future meeting in respect of the motion.

Request for the Exhibition of Unclassified Films

The Director of Planning and Building Control reported that a request had been received from the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland to permit the screening of unclassified films produced by A-Level and GCSE students at Cineworld. The films were intended to be showcased as part of a screening event. The films had not been classified by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), the independent body responsible for film classification in the UK. CCEA had proposed that the films be treated as equivalent to a 12A classification, which permitted children under the age of 12 to view them, if accompanied by an adult. The audience for the screenings would primarily consist of students aged 15 and older, along with teachers, principals, and representatives from the film industry.

The Council had the authority to impose conditions on cinema licenses, including restrictions on the admission of children to films deemed unsuitable. While the BBFC typically classified films shown in commercial cinemas, the Members were advised that the Council could approve the screening of unclassified films under specific circumstances, provided it was satisfied with the proposal and attached appropriate conditions.

The Committee was advised that the films had been reviewed by schools, examination bodies, and a judging panel. The applicant, CCEA, had assured the Council that the films were appropriate for the intended audience and were representative of a 12A rating.

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. I. Arthurs, CCEA representative, to the meeting. She provided the details of the event, which was now in its seventh year, with approximately 500 students attending, representing 20 different schools.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to permit the screening of the unclassified films in accordance with an age classification of 12A which had been specified by CCEA.

Guidance for Students and Landlords in respect of their Rights and Responsibilities regarding HMOs

The HMO Manager presented the following report to the Committee:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 At your meeting on 22 January 2025 Councillor McKay requested that officers would seek to provide students who were attending universities and regional colleges with information on their rights in relation to leasing a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

1.2 After discussion the committee agreed that officers would:

- 1. engage with Corporate Communications (Communications, Marketing and External Affairs) in order to update the Council’s website with additional and specific guidance for students and landlords in respect of their rights and responsibilities regarding Houses in Multiple Occupation;**
- 2. post links to that information through a social media campaign, linking in with the universities, regional colleges and Students’ Unions;**
- 3. provide guidance, with a QR code linking to the information online, highlighting the rights and responsibilities, to be circulated to landlords for them to provide to their new tenants;**
- 4. consider the budget requirement for an enhanced information campaign from financial year 2025/26 onwards; and**
- 5. seek to provide information on HMOs across Northern Ireland, rather than just for the City of Belfast.**

The purpose of this report is to update members on the information campaign

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is requested to note the content of the report

3.0 Main report

Campaign background

3.1 The NIHMO Unit produced an information guide for HMO tenants, following a request from Licensing Committee in January 2025 that officers would seek to provide students who were attending universities and regional colleges with

information on their rights in relation to leasing a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO),

- 3.2 The NIHMO team engaged with Communications, Marketing and External Affairs team to publish the guide on the Belfast City Council website and promote it.

Campaign aims

3.3

- Raise awareness of the tenants' information guide, as a useful resource for both prospective tenants and tenants already in HMO accommodation.
- Provide information to landlords, who can pass this on to their tenants.
- Target secondary audiences such as parents of students and University Students' Unions, who offer advice on accommodation.

Key audiences

3.4

- Students from universities and regional colleges
- Renters of Houses in Multiple Occupation
- Parents of students
- HMO landlords and managing agents
- Student accommodation advisors

Communication approach

- 3.5 The campaign began week commencing 15 September 2025, to coincide with the start of the university year.

3.6 Communication channels included:

- Belfast City Council website (www.belfastcity.gov.uk)
- Press
- Belfast City Council social media accounts ([Facebook](#) and [X](#))
- Belfast City Council intranet (Interlink)
- City Matters residents' magazine (winter edition 2025)
- Communication through partner links – universities and National Students' Unions and Landlords Association.

Campaign by channel

3.7 Belfast City Council website

- [Know your rights – a guide for HMO tenants](#) was published on the Belfast City Council website on 15 September 2025. Content and keywords were optimised for search engines, making information easier to find on the website.

So far, the guide has been viewed over 140 times, and we will continue to promote it in the coming months.

- [Information for tenants](#) webpage and [Information for students](#) webpage was updated with content and a call-to-action button to the information guide. <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/HMOtenants> web address was used in press release to direct to the information.

Views of the [information for tenants](#) webpage have more than doubled since the launch, compared to the previous month.

- The guide was promoted on the Belfast City Council website homepage.
- The guide was added to Belfast City Council A to Z page on website.

3.8 Press

A press release was issued on 15 September 2025, which led to media coverage in the Irish News, Belfast Live, U105 and 4NI.

The image included the Deputy Chair of Belfast City Council's Licensing Committee and representatives from Queen's Students' Union, Ulster University Students' Union's Belfast branch and National Union of Students NI.

Link to press release on Belfast City Council website:

www.belfastcity.gov.uk/News/New-guide-on-tenants-rights-launched-ahead-of-Fres

Social media

- 3.9 Posts from Belfast City Council's social media accounts supported the web content and press release, by encouraging students to access the guide.

The posts included a video featuring the HMO Manager and the President of the National Union of Students NI.

3.10 Internal communications

An article was added to Belfast City Council's intranet, Interlink, on 18 September 2025.

The content was aimed at parents or guardians of young people looking to rent HMO accommodation and featured the social media video.

The article received 168 views and was also displayed to frontline staff on 54 screens based at locations across the council.

3.11 City Matters

An article about the role and responsibilities of HMO tenants and landlords, including a link to the guide, was featured in the latest edition of City Matters.

This was distributed to over 160,000 Belfast homes at the start of November.

3.12 Other forms of promotion

- Leaflets were designed, which the NIHMO team could distribute to landlords for their tenants' information packs or noticeboards. The leaflet gave a summary of the guide's content and a QR code with link straight to the guide on the website.
- The Marketing and Communication Coordinator spoke to Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University social media teams to encourage them to share messaging.
- The HMO Unit engaged with and provided copies of the campaign material to the Landlords Association for Northern Ireland, Housing Rights, Renters Voice and each of the other 10 Northern Ireland Council. Additionally, the campaign information was shared with the Department for Communities Housing Team.

3.13 Future communications

- Further promotion, including advertising, is being considered for January – February 2026. These have been identified as the months when students start to look for new accommodation again.
- A budget of £3,000 has been set aside from licence fee income towards the costs of the campaign in January / February. With a provisional budget of up to £10,000 for the financial year 2026/27

4.0 Financial & Resource Implications

4.1 NIHMO Unit operates on a cost neutral basis

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

5.1 None.”

A number of Members thanked the officers who had worked on the very successful campaign, which had already proved to be beneficial to students seeking accommodation for the upcoming academic year.

The Committee noted the report and, at the request of a Member, agreed that officers would provide statistics on the public level of engagement with the website on a quarterly basis.

Chairperson